

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we celebrate the anniversary of the independence of the United States, I would first of all congratulate the government and the people of Equatorial Guinea for the excellent organization, with Gabon, of the African Cup of Nations soccer tournament. Also, I would like to acknowledge and congratulate the government for the many infrastructure projects completed throughout the country, which have had a positive impact in the life of thousands of Equatoguineans.

The Government of Equatorial Guinea continues to invest in the economic and social development of the country. In this endeavor, it benefits from the active presence of U.S. companies in the economy of Equatorial Guinea. Beyond their responsible pursuit of business activities, these companies fulfill an important humanitarian and philanthropic role through Corporate Social Responsibility projects. I wish to take this opportunity to also thank them and to recognize their work.

I would like, however, to focus my remarks today on relations between the United States and Sub-Saharan Africa in general.

To do so, we can start by recalling the principles that, for 236 years, have sustained my country. The projection of these principles in our foreign policy informs the new U.S. Strategy Towards Sub-Saharan Africa, released just three weeks ago by President Obama.

If we were to guide ourselves just by the light of the political fireworks of an election year in the United States, we could reach wrong conclusions about the strength of our democratic institutions. Herein lies a characteristic of fully democratic states: to seem weaker than what they really are. Experience teaches us, however, that true democracies are more successful in meeting the needs of their citizens. A recent study about economic growth of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa proves it. Setting aside, for analytical reasons, countries that depend almost exclusively on oil revenues, this study shows that the seventeen countries that have experienced the greatest growth in recent times are also those which enjoy the highest levels of democracy (see *Emerging Africa: How 17 Countries Are Leading the Way*, by Steven Radelet).

The U.S. system of government is based on institutional checks and balances. The power of the executive is limited by congressional control over the budget. Through it, Congress manages the financial resources available to the executive to run the government and execute projects. Furthermore, Congress has tools to prevent and correct possible executive branch overreaching of authority. At the same time, the judiciary keeps a watchful eye over legislation approved by Congress and sees that institutions and every citizen abide by the law. The independence of the judiciary is guaranteed through the Senate's confirmation of judicial appointments, and the judges' lifetime terms of office, except if it is established that he or she has violated the law.

Every society aspiring to build a fully democratic system can and should decide how to peacefully guarantee that the intrinsic tendency of political power to long for and capture ever more power, does not prevent the enjoyment of the rights and responsibilities derived from natural law, for the benefit of all human beings. Thomas Jefferson, the main drafter of the United States Declaration of Independence, identified them as the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has noted, “these are not just American values, they are universal values, and so today is also a celebration of our common humanity.”

In sharing these observations about the model followed by the United States to pursue and protect these ideals, though imperfect and having faced significant challenges throughout history, we are not proposing a democratic panacea. What we hope is to guide the sincere and cordial relations we have with African governments --which are necessarily based on our own historical experiences-- towards advancing dialogue in societies of countries where there is still a democratic deficit.

That dialogue, domestically and internationally, derives its legitimacy from the commitments that most African countries have made by voluntarily adhering to regional and international human rights treaties. It is a dialogue that is only really possible through the strengthening of civil society, freedom of speech and freedom of the press, and the responsible exercise of liberty –even if this liberty may be limited for historical reasons or lack of institutional capacity.

We wish the people of Sub-Saharan Africa to enjoy the same universal rights we do, such as the rule of law, equality of citizens before the law, economic and social progress, security, and the opportunity to take part in government through free and fair elections.

In this regard, in closing my remarks, I want to refer you to President Obama’s letter introducing the U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa, which I mentioned earlier, in which he notes that:

“Addressing the opportunities and challenges in Africa requires a comprehensive U.S. policy that is proactive, forward-looking, and that balances our long-term interests with near-term imperatives... (...) and elevates two efforts that will be critical to the future of Africa: strengthening democratic institutions and boosting broad-based economic growth, including through trade and investment. Strong, accountable, and democratic institutions, sustained by a deep commitment to the rule of law, generate greater prosperity and stability, and meet with greater success in mitigating conflict and ensuring security. Sustainable, inclusive economic growth is a key ingredient to security, political stability, and development, and it underpins efforts to alleviate poverty, creating the resources that will bolster opportunity and

allow individuals to reach their full potential.”

May God bless America and the Republic of Equatorial Guinea.